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SUBJECT: NDI HOLDS WOMEN'S FORUM IN YEREVAN

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SUMMARY

¶1. (U) The National Democratic Institute (NDI) put on a well-attended forum about women and elections earlier this month. The event was the latest in a series that is part of NDI's Women's Leadership Forum of Armenia (WLFA), established in March, part of the Mission's USAID Democracy Promotion Strategy. The Speakers from OSCE, UNDP, and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) spoke to the crowd of about 80 women (mostly members of political parties) about their efforts to increase women's participation in politics. They discussed opportunities for NGO funding, training of election officials, and regional cooperation on women's issues. The event received broad, positive play in the press. End Summary.

¶2. (U) NDI has organized several women's forums in Yerevan and the marzes over the last several months as part of WLFA, NDI office co-director Taline Sanassarian told us. (Note: WLFA is part of NDI's broader global initiative, the "Win with Women" Global Action Plan. End Note.) As a result of the first forum event in March, WLFA participants set a goal of increasing the percentage of women on political party rolls from 15 percent to 25 percent. Sanassarian said 17 political parties have signed on to this goal, and that there is discussion of using it to launch legislative changes.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DISCUSS THEIR EFFORTS

¶3. (U) At the July 11 forum, which received broad, positive, and non-judgmental play in the press, OSCE Democratization Officer Blanka Hancilova discussed the need for more creative participation of women in the political sphere. She suggested there was a need for institutionalized gender education in high schools and universities, and for regular consideration of gender issues in state policies. Hancilova mentioned OSCE would be seeking NGO funding proposals for gender-oriented programs this fall. IDEA Resident Representative Armineh Arakelian discussed her IDEA's two-year training program for electoral administrators. IDEA signed a cooperation agreement with the Central Election Commission in May regarding the program, which focuses civic electoral education, democratic public participation, and on building professionalism of electoral administrators. UNDP Gender and Politics Program Coordinator Nune Harutyunyan said UNDP planned to offer programmatic assistance to women in politics across the Caucasus, and to promote regional cooperation on women's issues.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) During the question and answer period, women primarily wanted to know what more the international organizations could do for them, sometimes sounding downright entitled. One stood up and said something in Armenian to the effect of, "This forum is all well and good, but what are you actually doing for us?" While there was very little constructive or creative discussion, the large turnout and the frustration expressed by the suggest that the women party members are eager to play a greater role in Armenian politics.
EVANS